



JEET KUNE DO

-----toward personal liberation.

Bruce Lee



## FOREWARD

Three swordsmen sat down at a table in a crowded Japanese inn and began to make loud comments about their neighbor, hoping to goad him into a duel. The master seemed to take no notice of them, but when their remarks became ruder and more pointed, he raised his chopsticks and, in quick snips, effortlessly caught four flies on the wing. As he slowly laid down the chopsticks, the three swordsmen hurriedly left the room.

The story illustrates a great difference between Oriental and Western thinking. The average Westerner would be intrigued by someone's ability to catch flies with chopsticks, and would probably say that has nothing to do with how good he is in combat. But the Oriental would realize that a man who has attained such complete mastery of an art reveals his presence of mind in every action. The state of wholeness and imperturbability demonstrated by the master indicated his mastery of self.

And so it is with martial arts. To the Westerner the finger jabs, the side kicks, the back fist, etc., are tools of destruction and violence which is, indeed, one of their functions. But the Oriental believes that the primary function of such tools is revealed when they are self-directed and destroy greed, fear, anger and folly.

Manipulative skill is not the Oriental's goal. He is aiming his kicks and blows at himself and when successful, may even succeed in knocking himself out. After years of training, he hopes to achieve that vital loosening and equability of all powers which is what the three swordsmen saw in the master.

In every day life the mind is capable of moving from one thought or object to another - "being" mind instead of "having" mind. However, when face to face with an opponent in a deadly contest, the mind tends to stick and loses its mobility. Stickability or stoppage is a problem that haunts every martial artist.

Kwan-in (Avalokitesvara), the Goddess of Mercy, is sometimes represented with one thousand arms, each holding a different instrument. If her mind stops with the use, for instance, of a spear, all the other arms (999) will be of no use whatever. It is only because of her mind not stopping with the use of one arm, but moving from one instrument to another, that all her arms prove useful with the utmost degree of efficiency. Thus the figure is meant to demonstrate that, when the ultimate truth is realized even as many as one thousand arms on one body may each be serviceable in one way or another.

"Purposelessness," "empty-mindedness" or "no art" are frequent terms used in the Orient to denote the ultimate achievement of a martial artist. According to Zen, the spirit is by nature formless

and no "objects" are to be harbored in it. When anything is harbored there, psychic energy is drawn toward it, and when psychic energy loses its balance, its native activity becomes cramped and it no longer flows with the stream. Where the energy is tipped, there is too much of it in one direction and a shortage of it in another direction. Where there is too much energy, it overflows and cannot be controlled. In either case, it is unable to cope with ever-changing situations. But when there prevails a state of "purposelessness" (which is also a stage of fluidity or mindlessness), the spirit harbors nothing in it, nor is it tipped in one direction; It transcends both subject and object; it responds empty-mindedly to whatever is happening.

True mastery transcends any particular art. It stems from mastery of oneself - the ability, developed through self-discipline, to be calm, fully aware, and completely in tune with oneself and the surroundings. Then, and only then, can a person know himself.

-- Bruce Lee

The usefulness of a cup is  
in its emptiness

A learned man once went to a Zen master to inquire about Zen. As the Zen master talked, the learned man would frequently interrupt him with remarks like, "Oh yes, we have that too. . . .", etc.

Finally the Zen master stopped talking and began to serve tea to the learned man; however, he kept on pouring until the tea cup over flowed.

"Enough, no more can go into the cup!" the learned man interrupted.

"Indeed I see," answered the Zen master. "If you do not first empty your cup, how can you taste my cup of tea?"

I hope you will read the following paragraphs with open-mindedness, leaving all the burdens of preconceived opinions and conclusions behind----this act, by the way, has in itself a liberating power----on the other hand, do relate the material to yourself because it is concerned with the blossoming of a martial artist, and not a "Chinese" martial artist, a "Japanese" martial artist, etc., etc. A martial artist is firstly a man, which is ourselves; nationalities has nothing to do in martial art.

Supposing several persons who are trained in different combative arts have just witnessed a fight, I am sure we will hear different versions of it afterwards. The consequence is quite understandable, for one cannot see a fight "as is" say from the point of views of a boxer, a wrestler, a karate-ka, a judo-ka, or anyone who is trained in a particular method because he will see the fight according to the limits

of his particular conditioning. Every attempt to describe the fight is really an intellectual and emotional reaction, a partialized idea of the total fight; in this case, depending on one's likes and dislikes. Fighting is not something dictated by your conditioning as a Korean martial artist, a Chinese martial artist, etc. True observation begins when devoids of set patterns, and freedom of expression occurs when one is beyond systems.

One cannot express himself fully and totally when one is imposed by a partial set structure or style. Combat "as is" is total (including all "that is" as well as "that is not"), without favorite lines or angles, having no boundaries and always fresh and alive; is never set and constantly changing. Combat definitely must not be limited to your personal inclination, your physical make-up, or your environmental conditioning-----although these are also parts of the total combat. Should there be any confinement of any sort, that is, setting combat into a choiced mould, there will always be a resistance of one's set pattern of "what should be" as opposed to the ever changing "what is".

To set the record straight, I have NOT invented a new style, composite, modified or otherwise; that is, set within distinct form and laws as apart from "this" style or "that" method. On the contrary, I hope to free my followers from clinging to styles, patterns or moulds. So do remember that the term Jeet Kune Do is merely a name used, a mirror in which we see ourselves. The name brand is nothing special.

Just what is a classical style of martial art? First and foremost, we must realize the fact that man created styles. Disregard the many fancy historical origins of their founders---by a wise ancient monk, by special messenger in dream, in a holy revelation, etc.-----a style should never be the gospel truth, the laws and principles of which can never be violated. Man, the human being, is always more important than any style.

The founder of a style might be exposed to some partial truth, but as time passed by, especially after the passing away of its founder, this partial truth became a law, or worse still, a prejudiced faith against the "different" sects. In order to pass along this knowledge from generation to generation, the various responses had to be organized and classified, and presented in logical orders. So what might have started off as some sort of personal fluidity of its founder is now solidified knowledge, a preserved cure all for mass conditioning. In so doing, the followers have made this knowledge not only a holy shrine, but a tomb in which the founder's wisdom is buried. Because of the nature of organization and preservation, the means would become so elaborated that tremendous attention must be given to them, and gradually the end is forgotten. The followers will then accept this "organized something" as the total reality of combat. Of course, many more "different" approaches would spring up, probably as a direct reaction to "the other's truth". Pretty soon these approaches too would become large organizations with each claiming to possess "truth" to the exclusion of all other styles. More and more the style becomes more important than its ~~practitioner~~ practitioner.

The professed cure of a classical style is itself a disease. A style has the tendency to "set" and "trap" reality into a choice mould. Maybe because one does not want to be left uncertain or insecure, so he "organizes" a choiced pattern of combat. Disregard the cause, its followers are being enclosed and controlled within the style's limitation which is certainly less than ~~their own potential~~ their own potential. Like anything else, prolonged imitative drilling will promote mechanical precision; however, the margin of freedom of expression grows narrower and narrower. So one can follow formulas by "keeping his elbows in", "sinking his spirit down", "be this",

or "be that", in the long run he will just be moulded according to someone else's fancy. Remember the whole is evidenced in all parts, but an isolated part, efficient or not, does not constitute the whole. So one can say "a little learning is a dangerous thing" applies appropriately to those who are conditioned to a particular approach to combat.

If mere mechanical routine efficiency will make everyone a martial artist, then all is well. Unfortunately, combat, like freedom, is something that cannot be preconceived. Preformations<sup>simply</sup> lack the flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing. At this point, many would ask how then do we gain this unlimited freedom? I cannot tell you because it will then become an approach. Although I can tell you what is not, I cannot tell you what is. "That" my friend, you will have to find out all by yourself, for there is no help but self-help. What is more, who says we have to "gain" freedom?

In traditional martial art being wise seems to be a constant process of accumulation of fixed<sup>knowledge</sup>; like a first degree knows so many sets or techniques, a second degree a little more; or a X brand martial artist, a kicker, should accumulate Y brand's hand techniques, or vice versa. Accumulation of fixed knowledge is not the process of JKD; rather, it is that of discovering the cause of ignorance, and oftentimes involving a shedding process. Remember my friends that ultimately, knowledge in martial art simply means self-knowledge, and JKD can become intelligible only in the process of self discovery. Freedom has always been with us and not something to be gained at the end through following some particular formulas. We do not ~~be~~ "become", we simply "are". So the training in JKD is toward this, of "being" mind, rather than "having" mind. Sterile patterns are incapable of such liveliness and freshness, and preformations only squelch creativity and impose mediocrity. Also, the

mystical mind training promotes not the promised internal power but psychological constipation. In JKD, whether it be inward or outward training, the techniques used are often temporary expedients, the aim of which is to liberate the spirit rather than to bind the body.

Unlike the traditional approach, there is never a series of rules, a classification of techniques, etc., that constitute a so called JKD method of fighting. To begin with, there is no such thing as a method of fighting. To create such a method is pretty much like putting a pound of water into wrapping paper and shape it-----although much futile arguments exist nowadays as to the choice of colors, textures, etc. of the wrapping paper.

Briefly, JKD is not a form of special conditioning with a set of beliefs and particular approach. So basically it is not a "mass" art. It does not look at combat from a certain angle but from all possible angles because it is not bound on any system. Although it utilizes all ways and means to serve its end (efficiency is anything that scores), it is bound by none, and is therefore free from them. In other words, JKD, although possessed of all angles, is itself not possessed; for any structure, however efficiently designed, becomes a cage if the practitioner is obsessed with it. To define JKD as a style (Gung Fu, Karate, kick-boxing, etc.) is to miss it completely. If JKD is not a style or a method, maybe it is being neutral or maybe it is indifference. However, this is not the case, <sup>either</sup> for JKD is both at once "this" and "not this", and JKD is neither opposed to styles nor not opposed to them. To understand fully, one must transcend the duality of "for" and "against" into one organic whole. Within the Absolute there is simply no distinction; everything IS. A good JKD artist rests in direct intuition.

When I first arrived in the U.S. I was teaching my version of Wing Chun -----I had my "Chinese" system then. However, since then I no longer am



interested in systems or organization. Organized institute tends to produce patternized prisoners of a systemized concept, and the instructors are often fixed in a routine. Of course, what is worse is by imposing the member to fit a lifeless pre-formation, their natural growth are blocked. <sup>A TEACHER, A GOOD TEACHER, FUNCTIONS AS A SOURCE OF TRUTH, BUT NOT A GIVER OF TRUTH.</sup> He employs a minimum of form to lead his student to the formless. Furthermore, he points out the importance of being able to enter a mould but not being caged in it; or to follow the principles without being bound by them, for a pliable, choiceless observation without exclusion is so essential in JKD, or martial art---an "altogether alert awareness" without its center or its circumference; <sup>a teacher</sup> to be in it, but not of it. Above all, ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> does not depend on a method and drill systematic routines; instead, he studies each individual student and awakens him to explore himself, both internally and externally, and ultimately integrating himself with his being. Such teaching, which is really no teaching, requires a sensitive mind with great flexibility and is difficult to come by nowadays.

Sincere and serious learners are equally difficult to come by too. Many of them are five minute enthusiasts, some of them come with all intention, but unfortunately, most of them are second hand artists, basically a conformer. He seldom learns to depend upon himself for expression; instead, he faithfully follows an imposed pattern. So what is nurtured is the depending mind rather than independent inquiry. As time goes by he might understand some routines and might even be skillful according to a particular pattern. However, he has not come to understand himself. In other words, he has gained control of the manipulative skill he has but not what he is in himself.

Martial art is not merely the physical act of filling time and space through some sort of precision like movement. Machines can do that too. As he matures, a martial artist will realize that his kick or punch is really not so much a tool to conquer his opponent, but a tool to explode through his

consciousness, his ego, and all his mental blocks. Indeed, the tools are ultimately means for penetrating the depth of his being so that he will restore this equilibrium of his inner center of gravity. With this vital inward loosening flows his outward expression of his tools. Behind each physical movement of an accomplished martial artist is this wholeness of being, this all inclusive attitude.

How often we are told by different "masters" and "professors"---and we do have many philosophical and sometimes scholastic professors around--- that martial art is life itself; however, I wonder how many of them really appreciate that statement and truly understand. To be sure, life does not mean a partialized something, a frame. Life is never stagnation. It is a constant movement, un-rhythmic movement, as well as constant change. Instead of flowing with this change choicelessly, many of the martial art "masters", past and present, have built an illusion of fixed forms, solidifying the ever-flowing, dissecting the totality, organizing choiced patterns, planning spontaneity, separating the harmonious unity into duality of the soft versus the firm, etc., etc. The result is quite evidenced. In martial art we have now many many insensitized patternized robots around listening to their own screams and spiritual yells. They are merely performing their methodical routines as response rather than responding to "what is". They no longer "listen" to circumstances; they "recite their circumstances". These poor souls have become those organized forms, they are those classical blocks; in short, they are the "product" of conditioning handed down hundreds and thousands of years ago.

Oftentime the question is asked whether JKD is against form. It is true that there is no pre-arranged sets or kata in JKD. However, in any physical movement there is always a most efficient and alive manner to accomplish the purpose of the performance for each individual-----that is, in regards to proper leverage,

Live, efficient movement that liberates is one thing, sterile classical set that binds and conditions is another. Also, there is a subtle difference between "having no form" and having "no-form"; the first is ignorance, the second, transcendence.

There is no standard in total combat, and expression must be free. That liberating truth is a reality only in so far as it is experienced and lived in its suchness by the individual himself, and this truth is far beyond any styles or disciplines. Remember too that JKD is just a name used, a boat to get one across, and once acrossed is to be discarded, and not to be carried on one's back. These few paragraphs at best are merely "a finger pointing to the moon". Please do not fix your intense gaze on the finger and thus miss all the heavenly glory. After all, the usefulness of the finger is in "pointing away from itself to the light which illumines finger and all".

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JEET KUNE DO

One Cannot see a fight "as is" say from the point of view of a boxer, a wrestler, or anyone who is trained in a particular method; because he will see the fight according to the limits of his particular conditioning. Fighting is definitely not something dictated by your conditioning as a Chinese martial artist, a Japanese martial artist, ect. Take for instance the case of the boxer: he probably will criticize the point that the two fighters are too close to allow 'crispy' punching room. While the wrestler on the other hand will complain that one of the fighter should 'crowd' and smother the other's 'crispiness' thus be close enough to apply grappling tactics. So a split second between the above two statements-----when viewed from totality-----the boxer could have switched into smothering grappling tactics when there is no crispy punching room. The wrestler, when out of distance, could have either kicked or punched as a mean to bridge the gap for his specialty. True observation begins when devoids of set patterns, and freedom of expression occurs when one is beyond systems.

One cannot express fully---the important word here is fully---when one is imposed by a partial set structure or style. "What is" is total (including all 'that is' as well as 'that is not'), without boundaries or lines, alive, fresh, and always new. Now how can one be truly aware when there is a screen of one's set pattern of 'what should be' as opposed to 'what is'. Because one does not want to be left uncertain or insecure, so he 'organizes' a choice pattern of combat, a pattern of artificial relationship with the opponent, a planned spontaneity, ect. From imitative drilling on such organized 'land-swimming patterns' the practitioner's margin of freedom of expression grows narrower and narrower. It won't be long before he will become paralyzed within the framework of such patterns and accept the pattern as reality, the real thing. In fact, many of the artists are merely performing their methodical routines as response, rather than responding to 'what is'. They no longer 'listen' to circumstances, they "recite THEIR circumstances".

To set the record straight, I have NOT invented a new style or a modified style; that is, set within distinct form as apart from 'this' method or 'that' method. On the contrary, I hope to free my followers from styles, patterns, or moulds. In reality, the professed cure of a pattern is itself a disease, for it 'sets' and 'traps' reality into a choice mould. Just as one cannot get a piece of paper to wrap and shape water, fighting can never be made to conform to any one system. Freedom simply cannot be preconceived, and when there is freedom, there is neither good nor its reaction as bad. There is just no distinctions within the Absolute. My concerns are for those who are unknowingly being conditioned and solidified by a partialized and highly classical structure, with only "routine efficiency" rather than the freedom to express oneself. In most cases, they have become insensitized patternized robot, listening to their own screams and loud yells. They are those organized forms. They are ~~xxx~~ those classical blocks. In short, they are the result of thousands of years of conditioning.

One should never look at combat from a certain angle but from all possible angles. That is why in Jeet Kune Do one is taught to utilize all ways and means to serve its end (efficiency is not the adherent to classical form, efficiency is anything that scores), but, and that is a rather important but, he is bound by none. In other words, JKD, though possessed of all possible angles, is itself not possessed. For any structure, however intelligently designed, becomes a cage if the student is obsessed with it. Thus the students are taught to be able to enter a mould but not being caged in it, to follow the principles without being limited or bound by them. This is important, for a pliable, choiceless observation without exclusion is so essential in the cultivation of JKD. An "altogether alert awareness" without its center or its circumference-----to be in it, but not of it. This is where the value lies: the freedom to use techniques and to dispense with it. 

~~-----~~ To define JKD as a particular system (Gung Fu, Karate, Kick Boxing, ect.,  
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21 JKD believe that freedom has always been with us, and not something to be gained toward the end through some process of accumulation. We do not "become", we simply "are". The training is toward this, of "being" mind, rather than "having" mind. Pattern distorts and craves its perfection, and mind training promotes not internal power but psychological constipation. Whether it is inward or outward training, the JKD technique is used as to liberate the spirit rather than to bind the body.

is to miss it completely. JKD is outside of all particular structures and distinct styles.  
It is never a method of classified techniques but a mean of total self expression. There is never a series of rules, techniques, laws, principles, ect. that constitutes a system of fighting. For JKD is a process but not a goal, a constant movement rather than an established fixed pattern, a mean to be sure, but never an end. Many people mistake JKD as a composite style or being neutral or simply indifference. This is not true, for it is both at once "this" and "not this". JKD is neither opposed to styles nor not opposed to them. To understand, one must transcend the duality of 'for' and 'against' into one organic whole. A good JKD man rests in direct intuition.

The final aim of JKD is toward personal liberation. The instructions simply point the way to individual freedom and maturity. Mechanical efficiency or manipulatory skill is never as important as the inward awareness gained. Remember the fact that a ~~martial art~~ martial art man is not merely a physical exponent of some prowess he may have been gifted with in the first place. As he matures, he will realize that his kick is really not so much a tool to conquer his opponent, but a tool to explode <sup>to let a part of</sup> through his ~~ego, his anger, ect.~~ <sup>ego, his anger, ect.</sup> All the training is to round him up to be a complete man. Truth is a pathless road. It is total expression that has no 'before' or 'after'. Similarly, JKD is not an organized institution that one can be a member of. Either you understand or you don't, and that is that. I never believe in large organization with its domestic and foreign branches, affiliations, honorary members, ect. To reach the mass, some sort of a system is required. As a result, the members are conditioned according to that system. I believe in teaching just a few as it requires a constant alert observation on each individual in order to establish a direct relationship. A good teacher cannot be fixed in a routine, and many are just that. During teaching, each moment requires a sensitive mind that is constantly changing and constantly adapting. The teacher must never impose his student to fit a lifeless pattern, a pre-formation. Thus unlike the ~~traditional martial art~~



combat, and there are many master talkers, but he cannot really teach it. He might create this law and that way, but the students under him will merely be conditioned and controlled rather than freeing themselves to better artists. ~~They are not free~~ In truth, they are being enclosed within the system's limitation which is definitely less than their own potential. The more restrictive a method, the lesser the opportunity for one's individual freedom of expression.

An excellent instructor is an excellent athlete. I am sure as he advances in age, he will be at a disadvantage with a good young man. However, he has no excuse not to be a superb artist among his contemporaries, physically and mentally. An unfit and inactive instructor might be of help to the mediocre students, but he can never truly feel <sup>or</sup> understand.

Finally, a JKD ~~man~~ <sup>man</sup> who says JKD is exclusively JKD is simply ~~not~~ in with it. He is still hung up on his self-closing resistance; in this case, anchored down to a reactionary pattern, and naturally is still bound by another modified pattern and can only move within its limits. He has not digested the simple fact that truth exists ~~xxx~~ outside of all moulds and patterns, and awareness is never exclusive. JKD is merely a name used, a boat to get one across, and once acrossed, is to be discarded, and not to be carried on one's back. Let me also say that these few paragraphs <sup>or less</sup> are merely a finger pointing to the moon. Please do not take the finger to be the moon.

